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ABSTRACT

This paper examines two strategies for the teaching of Black Psychology. The first strategy is designed for use in undergraduate and graduate seminars. It relies on a course structure that requires each student to complete a weekly reading assignment, to give an oral abstract to the rest of the seminar, and to write a weekly thought paper on a topical area in Black Psychology. This strategy is viewed as incorporating elements of African-American Philosophical Psychology by emphasizing oral traditions, multi-disciplinary approaches, and cooperative and collective responsibility for the teaching of the course. The second strategy is one that involves the inclusion of black psychological perspectives in the general university lecture course. The paper provides illustrative examples for lectures on the history of psychology, psycho-biology, psychological assessment, and race relations. It is concluded that the black psychological/philosophical perspective should be included in every facet of the black scholar's instructional activities. (Author)

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Two Strategies for Teaching Black Psychology

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Running Head: Teaching Black Psychology

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Abstract

This paper examines two strategies for the teaching of Black Psychology. The first strategy is designed for use in undergraduate and graduate seminars. It relies on a course structure that requires each student to complete a weekly reading assignment, to give an oral abstract to the rest of the seminar, and to write a weekly thought paper on a topical area in Black Psychology. This strategy is viewed as incorporating elements of African-American Philosophical Psychology by emphasizing oral traditions, multi-disciplinary approaches, and cooperative and collective responsibility for the teaching of the course. The second strategy is one that involves the inclusion of Black Psychological perspectives in the general university lecture course. The paper provides illustrative examples for lectures on the history of psychology, psycho-biology, psychological assessment, and race relations. It is concluded that the Black Psychological/Philosophical Perspective should be included in every facet of the Black scholar's instructional activities.

Two Strategies for Teaching Black Psychology

Black Psychology is new to American colleges and universities. It has only been since the cultural revolution of the late 1960s that American universities have accepted Black scholars for training, and only since the 1970s since these scholars have graduated and begun to develop courses in Black Psychology.

Many of these curricular efforts have been documented by Reginald Jones in the two volume Sourcebook for the Teaching of Black Psychology (Jones, 1978). These volumes provide educators with an excellent and comprehensive set of over one hundred specific course outlines and syllabi in Black Psychology.

While all of these course descriptions, however, identified the philosophical, theoretical, and empirical bases of Black Psychology, few of them gave specific directions for the actual format of the course. It is presumed that the majority of these courses were lectures and/or discussions, but we are left vague as to the specific nature and organization of the various Black Psychology courses listed in the Sourcebook.

This paper addresses this shortcoming by identifying two very different strategies for the teaching of Black Psychology. The first strategy is one which might be expected in a paper of this nature: The organization of undergraduate and graduate seminars in Black Psychology. The second strategy, in contrast, is more concerned

with the incorporation of Black Psychology into the general undergraduate lecture course, especially in introductory-level courses.

In sum, this paper is not concerned with what to teach in Black Psychology as this material has been compiled elsewhere (see Butler, Clark, Hilliard, Howard, Reid, Wesson, Wade, & Williams, 1978; Jones, 1978). Rather, it focuses on how to teach Black psychology.

Teaching Undergraduate and Graduate Seminars

The teaching of Black psychology must incorporate African philosophical traditions in both the form and the substance of the course. This philosophical orientation has been explicated quite well elsewhere (e.g., Akbar, 1981; Butler, et al., 1978; Khatib, 1980; King, 1975; Nobles, 1980a, 1981). Briefly, it is a perspective that emphasizes historical analyses in understanding human behavior; that takes a "social problems" perspective in university education; that utilizes a multi-disciplinary approach to instruction; and that is designed for the liberation of the oppressed throughout the world.

Seminars in Black Psychology should emphasize the oral tradition that is basic to the Black culture. In like manner, these seminars should strive for placing students in cooperative and equal-status relationships that require that they collectively share in the responsibility for the course of instruction.

I accomplish this in my seminars by way of a very simple yet effective course structure. For each of the ten weeks of the

academic quarter, I bring reprints and/or xerox copies of empirical journal articles and book chapters to the seminar. I bring one reprint or xerox for each student in the seminar (if the seminar is small, say less than fifteen students). Each student is assigned one of these readings (either through volunteering or random assignment), and is assigned the responsibility of abstracting it orally in the next class session. If the class is fairly large, say over 15 students, then I bring about 10 reprints to class, assign nine of them randomly, and then assign the 10th reprint or article as a common reading for the rest of the class. At the next class session, the nine students who have been assigned a specific article make their presentation, and the 10th student is selected at random from the rest of the class.

Each student is requested to make his or her presentation brief: about five minutes and certainly less than ten minutes. In this way, the pace of the course is quite rapid, and the interest level is maintained throughout. The brevity of the presentations also alleviates much of the anxiety experienced by many students.

After each five-to-ten-minute presentation, an additional five-to-ten minutes is given to general class discussion and questions. At least that's the plan: I frequently let the class "go with the flow" and the discussion of a paper might extend to an hour or more. In a seminar of three hours, the instructor's most difficult task is regulating the discussion so that all of the presentations may be made.

Throughout the class session, I serve primarily as a discussant and facilitator; I never lecture. Occasionally I will supply additional information in the form of an impromptu mini-lecture, but never do I dominate the course in terms of time.

It is also important that we train our students in writing skills. Toward this end, I require a weekly paper of about five pages in length. These papers require students to synthesize the material that was presented in class, and to offer their own ideas and perspectives on the issues.

In order to provide coherence to the presentation of material, each week of the course examines a specific area of Black psychology: history and philosophical perspectives, methods, education and academic achievement, intelligence and personality assessment, personality and identity (i.e., self esteem issues), the family, the woman and male/female relationships, clinical/community, race relations, and criminal injustice. In each area, I select a representative bibliography, obtain copies or reprints of the articles (these are usually culled from my existing files), and bring them to the seminar for individual student assignments. Students also purchase books of readings (esp. Jones, 1980) that are used for common and individual reading assignments.

This course structure also affords the instructor considerable savings in time because the need for prepared lectures is eliminated. Thus, the bulk of my work in the teaching of undergraduate and graduate seminars in Black Psychology is finished by the first week

of the quarter, after the relevant bibliographies have been compiled. This economy of time offers a number of advantages, especially for assistant professors who are trying to come out on the right side of the tenure revolving door.

Now that I have taught a seminar in Black Psychology for the past three years, I have identified a number of articles and texts that provide the foundation for the substance of the course. The book of readings edited by Reginald Jones (1980), Black Psychology (now in its second edition), is an excellent source of material for an introduction to Black Psychology. The text edited by Boykin, Franklin, and Yates (1980), although less comprehensive than the Jones text, still provides a number of research articles that are central to the field. Similarly, the edited text by Lawrence Gary (1974), Social Research and the Black Community: Selected Issues and Priorities, although somewhat dated, has a number of articles that are timeless in their contribution to the Black social sciences. Also, the series of monographs published by the National Institute of Education (e.g., Cross, 1977) contain a number of articles that emphasize empirical demonstrations of Black Psychology. Finally, the series of texts published by Sage Publications on The Black Family (McAdoo, 1981), The Black Woman (Rodgers-Rose, 1980), The Black Male (Gary, 1981), and Contemporary Black Thought (Asante & Vandi, 1980), provide a large supply of readings that are ideally suited for the teaching of seminars in Black Psychology.

Several journals provide an ample supply of current research and theoretical material relevant to Black Psychology. These include the Journal of Black Psychology, The Black Scholar, Black Books Bulletin, the Journal of Negro Education, and the Journal of Non-White Concerns in Personnel and Guidance. In addition, the Guide to Scholarly Journals in Black Studies (The Chicago Center for Afro-American Studies and Research, 1981), is a rich sourcebook for contemporary publications in Black studies.

In addition, a number of specific journal articles may be considered to be "classics" in the field. In the area of philosophical, historical, and methodological perspectives, the articles by Caplan and Nelson (1973), Boykin, (1977), Banks (1976), Green (1977), Guthrie (1976, 1980), Slaughter (1973), and Whitney and Burlew (1977) are invaluable. In the area of education and academic achievement, articles by Green and Griffore (1980), Jorgensen (1973), and Sullivan (1973), provide lasting conceptual insights. In the area of personality and self-esteem, I have found articles by Nobles (1973, 1980b), Stephan and Rosenfield (1979), Semaj (1980), Baldwin (1979), and Cross (1978), to be particularly useful. Concerning material relevant to the Black family, I recommend the journal articles by Coppock (1975), Slaughter, (1977), Johnson (1981), and Staples and Mirande (1980). Robert Hill's The Strengths of Black Families (1972), of course, provides a staple in this area as well and his more recent article (Hill, 1980) illustrates the continuing economic oppression of Black families. Concerning the Black woman and male/female

relationships, the edited text by Rodgers-Rose (1980) provides the essentials of this material, but I also recommend the recent issues of the Psychology of Women Quarterly (Murray & Scott, 1982) and The Black Scholar (Allen, 1981, 1982) that was recently devoted to the Black woman, and the journal edited by Nathan and Julia Hare, Black Male/Female Relationships, is a useful source of curricular material. Finally, concerning clinical and community psychology, articles by Awanbor (1982), Green (1981), Smith (1981) and Stehno (1982) are useful.

In sum, then, the first strategy for teaching Black Psychology relies on the active involvement of students in presenting the scientific literature to themselves. Students are given weekly reading assignments, they make oral presentations to the rest of the seminar on a weekly basis, and they communicate what they have learned in writing, also on a weekly basis. This course structure is suitable for large and small classes alike as I have successfully used it in classes as small as 14 and as large as 50 students.

It is also important, in this kind of seminar format, to provide constructive feedback for students. Toward this end, I devised two evaluation devices. The first is an "Evaluation of Oral Presentations" that establishes the criteria and grading scheme for an effective presentation. This evaluative scheme consists of four areas: Organization of Delivery, Comprehensiveness, Clarity of Expression, and Style of Presentation. Each of these areas are divided into a five-point qualitative scale. For Style of Presentation, for example,

the five points are: (5) Animated, enthusiastic, engaging, interesting; (4) Very good, but could improve on above points; (3) Fair style, but tended to be uninteresting, boring; (2) Very boring, put the class to sleep; (1) Awful.

The second assessment device is a form for the "Evaluation of Written Requirements." It consists of five areas of evaluation, each worth a total of 10 points. These areas are Organization, Comprehensiveness, Analysis, Writing Style, and Quality of Presentation. In addition, points are subtracted for spelling errors, lateness, and plagiarism. In each area, there is a five-point scale ranging from six to ten. In the area of Organization, for example, the five points are: (10) Paper well organized and thought out. Contains appropriate and explicit demonstrations of organization (e.g., headings and/or paragraph divisions). Has an overview with logical ordering to content; (9) Well organized, but presentation is vague in one or two spots; (8) Well organized, but presentation needs more of an overview, or explicit outline, or logical ordering to content; (7) Fair to decent organization, but order and outlines vague, no overview, or incomplete; (6) Poor organization, tends to ramble from idea to idea; and (5) Incoherent.

These evaluative devices are given to students at the beginning of the first class session, thus providing them with advance notice of the evaluative criteria. The evaluation of the oral presentation is given to each student as they complete their presentation, thus providing them with immediate feedback on their performance. Papers

are evaluated with a one-week turn around, and this is usually accomplished by "peer review."

Instructors differ in their bases for the allocation of grades. I have found that some students, objectively, don't write or speak well, especially at the beginning of the quarter. As a result, I grade more on effort and improvement than on the objective assessments of the students' performance. Because the course structure is both demanding and free flowing, however, the majority of students seem to optimize their academic potentials so that grading is largely routine.

Teaching Black Psychology in the General University Course

The second strategy for the teaching of Black Psychology is quite different. It relies on the traditional structure of university courses, especially undergraduate courses, by incorporating a Black Psychological/Philosophical Perspective in more of a lecture format. I teach Black Psychology in undergraduate and graduate seminars, as described above; but I also teach Black Psychology in my "non-Black" courses: Introductory Psychology and the Psychology of Social Issues. In this respect, this "second strategy" for the teaching of Black Psychology is based more on the philosophical orientation of the instructor, which is reflected in the structure and content of the courses.

In my introductory course, for example, I begin teaching Black Psychology in the very first lecture when I examine the historical

foundations of American psychology. Although my purpose in this lecture is to identify the historical developments in psychology since the early psycho-physicists, I actually begin my historical treatment several tens of thousands of years before the birth of Christ (thus incorporating a truer historical perspective). I point out that most of our human history is simply unknown, but the magnificent civilizations in Africa, Asia, and South America clearly imply scientific advances that must have included the science of human behavior. I note, in this first lecture in the introductory course, that much of what we are to learn in the rest of the course is biased by both time and culture. It is biased in time because traditional psychology asserts that psychology began in 1879. It is biased by culture because of the claim that psychology began in Germany and/or America, and because of the complete lack of course coverage relevant to African, Asian, and South American behavioral sciences. Also in this introductory lecture, I note that the early Greek philosophers, especially Plato, began the "science" of innate or genetic individual differences. Plato, after all, asserted that there are three types of individuals: rulers, warriors, and peasants. The rulers were governed by the brain, warriors by the heart, and peasants by their stomachs; and Plato asserted that these group differences were inherited. Galton, in 1879, picked up these philosophical biases in his Hereditary Genius, and these ideas were later propagated by the early American Functionalists, notably Terman, Cattell, and others (see Guthrie, 1976, 1980). Finally, I note that these historical

trends may be viewed contemporaneously in the work of Arthur Jensen (1969) and William Shockley (1971, 1972) who remain steadfast in their conviction that whites are superior to the other races in terms of intellectual capacities.

You can see, then, that even the introductory lecture on the history of psychology provides ample opportunity to incorporate the teaching of Black Psychology. Other areas in introductory or general psychology also provide such opportunities. In research methods, it may be emphasized that we must not place too much reliance on the traditional research methods in the social sciences, but must seek alternative formulations and strategies for discovering both empirical and philosophical truths. It should be emphasized that, as psychologists, we really don't know <u>that</u> much about human behavior; and because of the nature of human behavior, we really can <u>never</u> know that much, especially if we rely exclusively on so-called "objective" observation and measurement.

In physiological psychology, I will likely explain to my students that the psychobiologists are attempting to reduce the complexities of human behavior into discrete neuro-physiological or biochemical interactions. Such a reductionism, which relies solely on physicalistic analyses, can only lead to mis-guided theoretical formulations. A full understanding of human behavior must include meta-physical and/or spiritual components (cf. King, 1975; Fairchild, note 1).

In social psychology, I focus on attitude measurement, attitude structure, and attitude change. And in focusing on these areas, I

emphasize racial attitudes, prejudice, and discrimination. This emphasis provides an opportunity to again include historical analyses of human behavior, and to examine the individual and systemic origins of class and racial inequality in the United States. A number of studies may be called upon that illustrate the pervasiveness and constancy of white racism in this country.

In the area of psychological assessment, I reiterate my contention that everything, really, cannot be measured (especially in the realm of human attributes and qualities), and psychology's overemphasis on paper-and-pencil measures of intelligence and personality reflects the blind arrogance of the field.

It is also in this area of psychological assessment that I carefully examine the race and IQ controversy, again returning to Plato and Galton before examining the work of Jensen, et al. I use as many as three lecture hours in this important area, first by presenting the geneticist's position (as fairly as I can) and then by taking the issues point-by-point in rebuttal. In this connection, I like to incorporate the work of several Black psychologists, especially that of Robert Williams (e.g., Williams, 1975; Williams, Dotson, Don, & Williams, 1980; Williams & Mitchell, 1980).

There are a number of other ways that Black Psychology is incorporated in my general undergraduate courses. Again, this is more by way of orientation than of substance. My "formula" here is to simply do things in non-traditional ways. Briefly, I attempt to lecture from sources other than the text with a special emphasis on

current literature. I lecture on topics that are not included in the book at all, such as human sexuality, rape, non-verbal communication, clinical burnout, birth, death, and war and peace. And I de-emphasize inter-student competition by grading on a fixed scale rather than a curve.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the teaching of Black Psychology should permeate every aspect of the psychologist's instructional career. We should not only focus on the form and structure of seminars in Black Psychology, but equally important, perhaps more important, is the inclusion of Black Psychological perspectives in all of the courses that we teach.

Reference Note

1. Fairchild, H. H. Towards transcendence in male/female relations: Towards revolution! Paper read at the meeting of the National Association of Black Psychologists, Cincinnatti, Ohio, August, 1982. Manuscript submitted for publication, 1982.

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